

CONDITIONS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE SOUTH PLAIN REGION

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Összefoglalás - A Dél-Alföldön csak a német, horvát, szerb, szlovák és román etnikumok töredéke maradt meg, s arányuk a népesség 1,6 %-ára csökkent. Szegeden viszont különböző etnikumú személyek telepedtek le, egymásra találtak, új etnikai közösségekké formálódtak, s szlovák, szerb, lengyel, román, orosz, német, cigány, vietnami, görög, ukrán, arab, örmény és latin (spanyol) egyesületeket alapítottak. *Exlex* kisebbségek az orosz, a vietnami, az arab és a latin, amelyeknek kisebbségi jogai nincsenek, s egyesületeik csak magyar egyesületként működhetnek. A magyar, cigány és beás anyanyelvű közösségekből álló cigány etnikum a legnagyobb létszámú. A cigány gyermekek nem kapják meg a szükséges segítséget az iskola előkészítéshez és az iskolakezdéshez, ezért tanulásra és önmaguk eltartására egyaránt képtelen évfolyamaik kerülnek ki az iskolából.

Summary - In the South Plain only a fraction of the German, the Croatian, the Serbian, the Slovakian and the Rumanian ethnical groups abode, and their ratio decreased to 1.6% of the population. However, in Szeged persons of different ethnical units settled down, discovered each other, new ethnical communities were formed, and Slovakian, Serbian, Polish, Rumanian, Russian, German, Gypsy, Vietnamese, Greek, Ukrainian, Arabian, Armenian and Latin (Spanish) associations were established. The Russian, the Vietnamese, the Arabian and the Latin are *exlex* minorities who have no minority rights. Their unions can work only as Hungarian ones. The Gypsy ethnical group, which consists of minorities belonging to Hungarian, Romany and Boyash mother tongue, is the greatest in numbers. Gypsy children do not receive any help for preparation before going to school, therefore such Gypsy classes pass out from school that are incapable of learning and keeping themselves.

Key words: South Plain Region, ethnic assimilation, ethnic dissimilation, new ethnic communities, *exlex* minorities, Gypsies.

The South Plain Region is the Southeast part of Hungary, and territories of three counties – Bács-Kiskun, Csongrád and Békés counties – are involved in it. These present counties were established by the administrative reform in 1950 (*Fig. 1*). The territory of the South Plain Region is 18314 square kilometre; in 1998, the population was 1357000 people. The Peace Treaty of Trianon delimited the southern and eastern frontiers of the region as national boundaries in 1920, while the western and northern frontiers were determined as county boundaries in 1950. The law that the total territory of Hungary should be divided into seven planning-statistical regions provides it the three counties together are called South Plain for a long time by Social Geography, but from 1996 on, according to the requirements of European Union¹. The South Plain Region is one of these regions, and its ethnic conditions are remarkable, independently of association with European Union. (*Rátkai and Sümeghy, 2000*).

Around 5000 BC, new population settled, coming from the Balkan Peninsula to the Carpathian Basin. These neolithic communities were named after the areas of their most

¹ The Act XXI of 1996 on Regional Development and Regional Planning; and the Act XCII of 1999 amending the Act XXI of 1996 on Regional Development and Regional Planning.

significant excavation sites (namely the Körös-culture, Tisza-culture etc.). Later, mainly Iranian, Indoeuropean, Turkic and Mongolian groups (Scythians, Jazygians, Huns, Avars) arrived. In the 9th century (AD), Avars and Slavic population – under Bolgar-Turkic rule – lived in the region, while Hungarians appeared with the conquest, around 895.

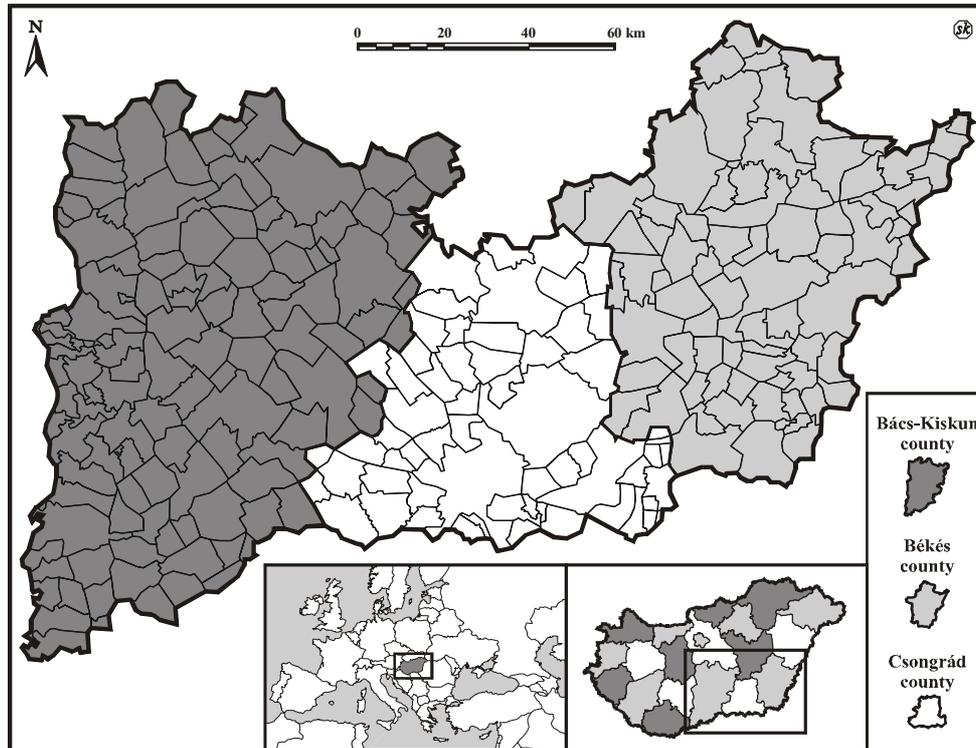


Fig. 1 The South Plain Region

However, some smaller or larger groups of the previously settled population always stayed and were assimilated to the new regime. Similarly, different ethnic groups became parts of the prevailing Hungarian population from the 10th century onwards, among other, western and eastern “newcomers” and the Cumans, who settled in the 13th century, and later assimilated.

Caused by the Turkish occupation and the frequent wars of the 16th-17th centuries, the area mainly depopulated. In the 18th century, ethnic groups with different language and cultural background started to populate this southern region, and created the mosaic picture of the area. The majority of Hungarian population in these places was originated from Baranya, which is west of the Danube, and from the territories lying to the north of the region. The Cumanian and Jazygian, who became considerably Magyarized before, and Gypsies speaking colompar-gurvari dialect occupied the region between the Danube and the River Tisza. Settlements of the southern Slavic ethnical groups, namely of Serbian, Croatian, Catholic Serbian, Dalmatian and Bosnian ones were situated on the south-eastern part of the area. The German were living mostly along the Danube, in Bácska, in some places in Békés county and in Szeged, while the Jews, together with a part of the German in towns (Baja, Kecskemét, Szeged). The largest contiguous area of the Slovak population

could be found in Békés county, but some Slovak settlements existed towards the west, in the area of the present Csongrád and Bács-Kiskun counties as well. The Rumanian was living only on the eastern edge of the region. Others besides them, namely the Ruthenian, the Armenian, the Czech, the French, and also other ethnical units, settled in from South Bácska, Transylvania and Banat, too.

CENTURIES OF LANGUAGE-ETHNICAL ASSIMILATION

Until the 18th century, the dividing line existed between different religions and classes of society, but afterwards both nationalism of different ethnical groups and Magyarizing aspirations of Hungarian state step by step gained ground.

After a few generations, families belonging to different nationalities adopted Hungarian ways. In places, inhabited mainly by the Hungarian, first of all in towns, and primarily in Szeged, they got mixed up with Hungarian population, that is assimilated themselves. The assimilation did not always take place as a 'voluntary' or a 'spontaneous' process, but it often was a result of increasing social pressure.

Szeged headed deliberate Magyarization of the region. Here, already in 1775 the independent schools of German and Dalmatian language of teaching were abolished; in 1837, the German singing and sermon were abrogated (*Gergely*, 1985). By 1840, in they made German troupe bankrupt and so expelled it (*Reizner*, 1899). In 1844, in the synagogue Lipót Löw was the first to preach a sermon in Hungarian in our country. Magyarization of the Jews and the German is also mentioned as an example of 'voluntary' assimilation. Behind the spontaneity and deliberateness there were flaring nationalism and such a social atmosphere that did not tolerate strangers.

Became keen on the first successes of Magyarization in Szeged, in 1904, DMKE (South-Hungarian Hungarian Educational Society) was established for the assimilation of non-Hungarian population in the whole Southland (area of mixed population towards the south-east of Szeged).

In 1895, János Reizner, the prominent historian of the city, with exaggeration, wrote the following lines: 'In Szeged, the newcomers were full of enthusiasm thanks to Hungarian genius. They inherited characteristics of the language and traditions, ways of the life, spirit, thinking, emotion and morals in all, without possibilities to maintain original characteristics or translate their attitudes into original inhabitants' life.' The Hungarian genius, of course, would not have been enough to Magyars them (Magyarization). The whole institution system of the state followed Magyarization more and more intensively, and frequently made decisions irrespective of laws. Finally, Reizner himself was forced to admit that it were 'the national spirit of the government and national action of the Church', but not 'the genius' that induced 'citizens of Szeged to became totally Hungarian in their heart, emotion and language.' (*Reizner*, 1895)

Around the turn of the century the assimilatory processes accelerated. 'This fact is a great honour and prominent national merit of Hungarian population in Szeged' – János Kovács, the outstanding ethnographer of the city thought about the course of events (*Kovács*, 1901). It meant that in addition to state and church institution system, the nationalistic general mentality, the increasing intolerance of population towards the non-Hungarian people played an important role in Magyarization.

Both the voluntary and the forced Magyarization took place most rapidly in the largest city of the region, while this process proved to be slowest among the non-Hungarian ethnical groups living in blocks in rural areas. Magyarization of the region accelerated only in the 20th century. After the first world war lots of Hungarian people, moreover the German, escaped from south and east to this region and under the pressure of nationalistic propaganda lots of Rumanian and Serbian people emigrated to the neighbours countries. The peace treaty separately stipulated the option of new subject in case of the Serbians (Oltvai, 1991). In Hungary, nationalism and anti-Semitism became more and more pronounced, and led to confiscation of property of Jew descent people; and later on, in 1944 gave rise to their removal by force, to Holocaust. From 1946 to 1948, the majority of the German was exiled to Germany, while the great masses of the Slovakian, in accordance with 'a population exchange', was expatriated to Czechoslovakia. The discrimination of the Serbian and the Croatian became general from 1948 to 1953, during deterioration of our relation to Yugoslavia. Under the influence of all these events, the abandonment of the minority languages accelerated, and the majority of people chose the 'voluntary' assimilation, the assimilation into Hungarians. In 1960, liquidation of the latest, remained educational institutions of the minorities can be considered as the decisive step promoting intentional ethnical homogeneity.

Between 1960 and 1990 the Hungarian dictatorial political system gradually slackened. Undesirable, democratic elements appeared, and became very numerous in it. In the middle of the 1980's, liberalism in political and cultural life gained ground, became uncontrollable; and in 1989, a new, democratic system has been established. The decades of the slackening were favourable for the minorities. Minority politics of the state progressively changed to their advantage.

As a consequence of political change of regime at the beginning of the 1990's, the main characteristics of the new minority politics came into view. The lack of the conception of the previous years was followed by an inconsistent, selective minority politics in the future, too. This trend framed a policy that had different relations to the three groups of minorities living in Hungary:

1. non-Gypsy and non-Hungarian (NN) *de jure* minorities, and
2. the NN *exlex* minorities existing 'only' *de facto*, and finally
3. the Gypsies existing *de jure*, too.

THE NON-HUNGARIAN AND NON-GYPSY (NN) POPULATION

Population of the South Plain was decreasing from 1960, and its rate in population of the whole country was diminishing, too. Simultaneously, the number and rate of the NN minorities also diminished. Both the native language and nationality were taken into consideration on the occasion of population censuses.

Between figures concerning to mother tongue and nationality-particulars we can notice dissension, difference, frequency of which is proportional to maladjustment that followed assimilation (Rátkai and Simeggy, 2000). This so-called identity-discrepancy can be marked equally in the case of the Rumanian, the Slovakian, the German, the Croatian, and the Serbian (Fig. 2). This difference is of a declining tendency, and presumably can be explained with the simultaneous influence of then already existing democratisation-process and the strengthening national sentiment. On the occasion of examining the NN population

we always take into consideration the native tongue particulars relating to the level of settlement.

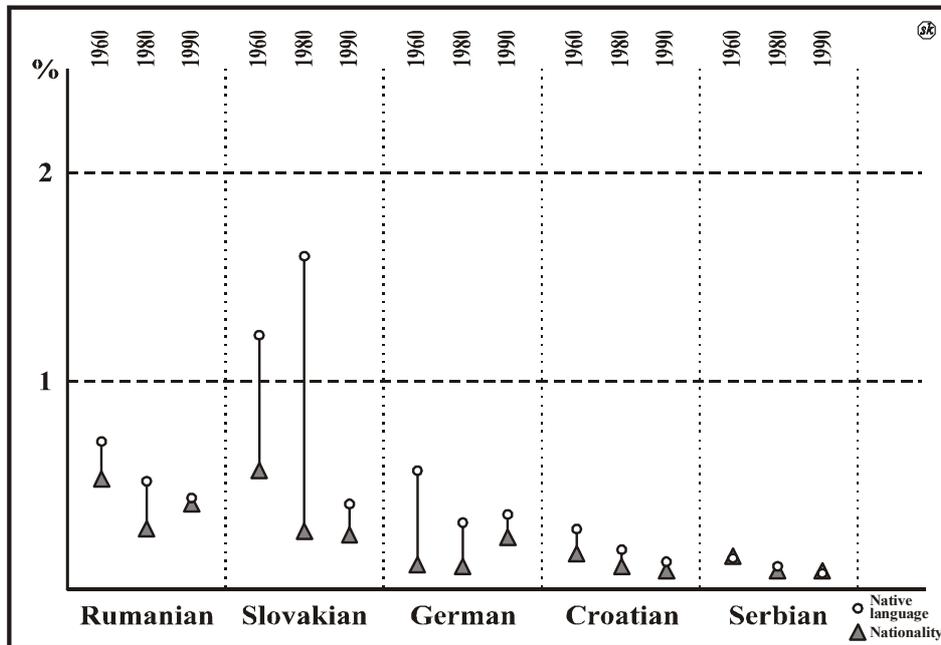


Fig. 2 The different between confessed native language and nationality of five minorities in the South Plain, in percent of the population

The NN-population of South-Plain Region diminished at a quicker pace than its whole population of South-Plain Region diminished from 3% to 1.6% (Table 1). Diminution took place in all three of the counties (Fig. 3).

Table 1 The total population and the NN-population of the South Plain

Year of census	Population	H%	NN	NN/SP%
1960	1488596	14.94	45903	3.08
1970	1472046	14.26	33981	2.31
1980	1462113	13.65	26607	1.82
1990	1395477	13.45	22532	1.61

H% = rate of population in population of Hungary

NN = non-Hungarian and non-Romany native language speaker population

NN/SP% = rate of NN-population in total population of South Plain

It is obvious that decrease of NN-population is of declining tendency, but there is no sign of the stopping of the decrease. In this respect, it is unlikely that we should observe new guideline after the population census due in 2001. In the 1980's, despite of decrease of NN-population, the number of settlements inhabited also by NN-population increased.

In 1980, persons of NN mother tongue lived in 206 settlements, from the total number of 249, while in 1990 - they lived in 226 settlements. If we observe only the most important settlements, that is ones in which at least 20 persons of NN mother tongue live, we can notice increase, too: the number of these settlements increased from 71 to 85. While

in 1980, the 98% of the NN-population lived in these 71 settlements, in 1990 a somewhat smaller part of the population, 96% of that lived in far too many – 85 – settlements. Expansion, of course, indicates different-speed in the instance of each minority.

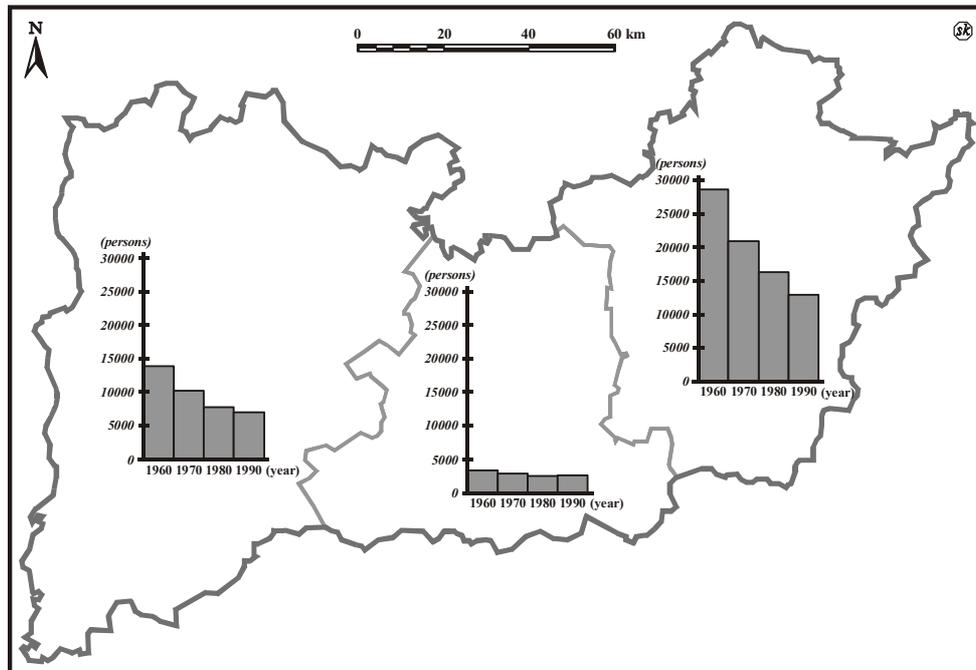


Fig. 3 The NN population in the counties of South Plain in the censuses 1960-1990

The expansion of the Slovakian was of the largest degree: in 1980, persons of Slovakian mother tongue lived in 114 settlements, from the total number of 249, while in 1990 - they lived in 141 settlements. Within 10 years their population decreased from 8825 to 5753, the number of settlements, in which more than 20 Slovakian people live, decreased from 28 to 21. However the rate of the Slovakian living in these settlements diminished from 96% to 91% only. So the Slovakian, who live in bigger blocks, have a fair chance of keeping their identity, but their assimilation to Hungarians in this areas takes place also in quick time.

The Croatian and German live mainly in the south-western parts, while the Serbian in the southern, the Slovakian and the Rumanian live in eastern border territories of the region. (About their settling down in detail: *Rátkai and Simeggy*, 2000). These border territories economically were underdeveloped before, and in last years their backwardness continued to grow longer. Lack of job opportunities continuously inclines people to migrate from these territories. Improving in effect German, Slovakian and Rumanian cultural opportunities in Baja, Békéscsaba and Gyula could not have stopped this process.

The role of Békéscsaba, with significant help of the state, continued to strengthen in Slovak education and culture; and in 1990, the Slovakian Research Institute was established here. In 1995, in Baja the School Centre of the German Living in Hungary was inaugurated. In 1999, in Gyula in the traffic centre of settlements inhabited by Rumanians, The Rumanian Educational and Cultural Centre was instituted.

THE NN *DE JURE* MINORITIES

At the beginning of the 1990's, the demand on extensive arrangement of minority question strengthened in relation to the distressing juridical and actual status of the Hungarian living in the neighbouring countries. A totally unfounded conception emerged and was effective. This theory emphasised that on mutual terms, by setting to rights of minority position in Hungary the Hungarian politics can reach the same attitude to the Hungarian beyond the national boundary. Though representatives of the state always denied, it was evident that this effort predominated in the minority law of 1993². One of the most obvious manifestations of this effort was the fact that the law acknowledges as Hungarian only those minorities who had lived in Large-Hungary before 1920.

They, except for the Gypsies about whom we will write separately, represent 12 minorities. Five of them (the Croatian, the German, the Rumanian, the Serbian and the Slovakian) live in many settlements of the South Plain, while four of them (the Armenian, the Greek, the Polish and the Ukrainian) live exclusively in Szeged³ (Fig. 4).

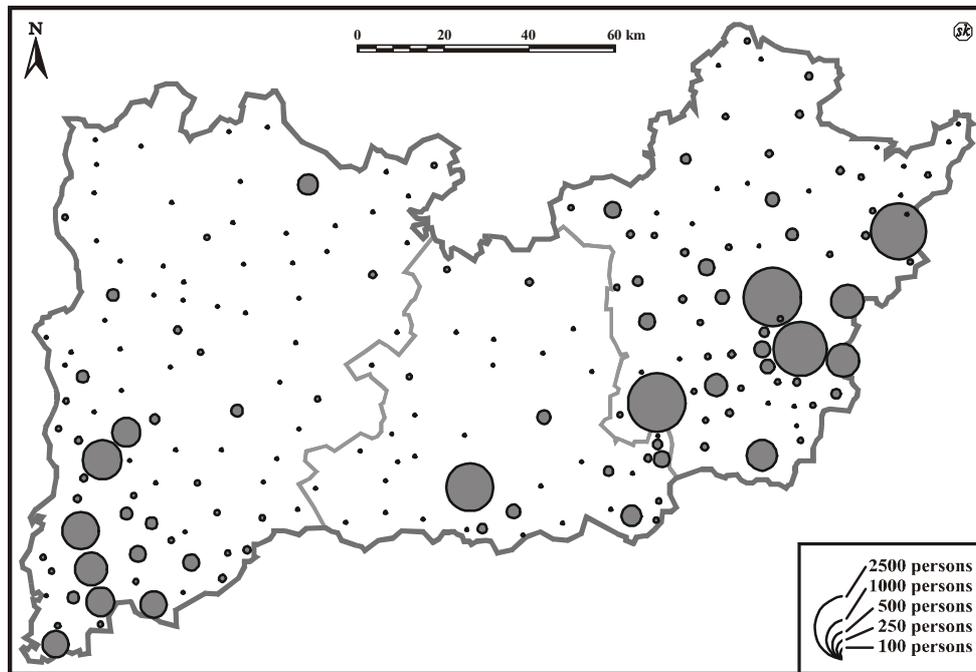


Fig. 4 The population of the NN *de jure* minorities in the settlements of South Plain in the census 1990

The *de jure* minorities that are considered existing ones are termed 'registered minorities' or recently 'indigenous minorities' by the state bureaucracy. These designations prove that the new law acknowledges existence of other minorities, too. The law enabled

² The Act LXXXVII. of 1993 about the Rights of Nationality- and Ethnical Minorities.

³ The Bulgarian, the Ruthenian and the Slovenian among the NN *de jure* minorities do not live in the South Plain Region.

the election of so-called minority self-governments. As a result of it, the activity of minorities developed.

In 1994-1995, in 22 settlements 35 minority self-governments were elected (Fig. 5); in 1998, in 53 settlements 76 self-governments were formed (Fig. 6, Tables 2, 3). In 1998, 26 German, 19 Slovakian, 10 Rumanian, 10 Croatian, 7 Serbian, 1-1 Greek, Polish, Armenian, and Ukrainian self-governments were established, in Szeged 8 of them, in Baja 3 and in further 14 settlements 2-2 were situated (Rátkai and Sümeghy, 2000).

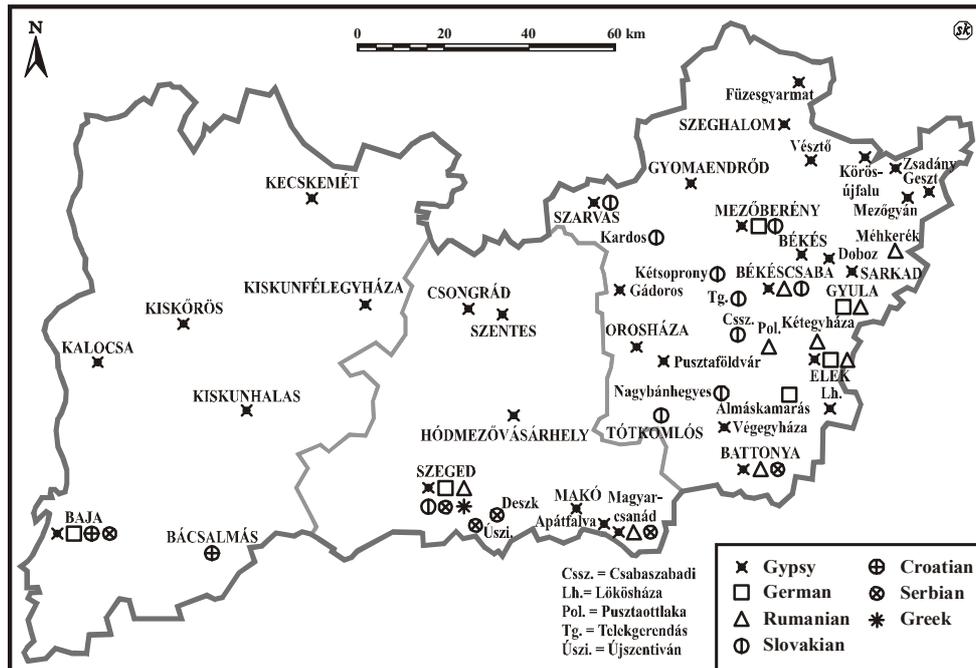


Fig. 5 The minority self-governments in the South Plain, elected in 1994-1995

Table 2 Number of the NN local minority self-governments in the South Plain

Election	German	Slovak	Rumanian	Serbian	Croatian	Greek	Polish	Armenian	Ukrainian	total
1994-95	7	10	9	6	2	1	-	-	-	35
1998	26	19	10	7	10	1	1	1	1	76

Table 3 Number of the settlements with NN minority self-governments

Year of the election	1994-1995	1998
Bács-Kiskun county	2	23
Békés county	16	24
Csongrád county	4	6
South Plain total	22	53

In the election of minority self-governments not only people belonging to the minorities can participate, but also any voter. In this way can it happen that in certain settlements the establishment of minority self-governments was supported by manifold electors than the rate of minority population. People took a stand on minority rights.

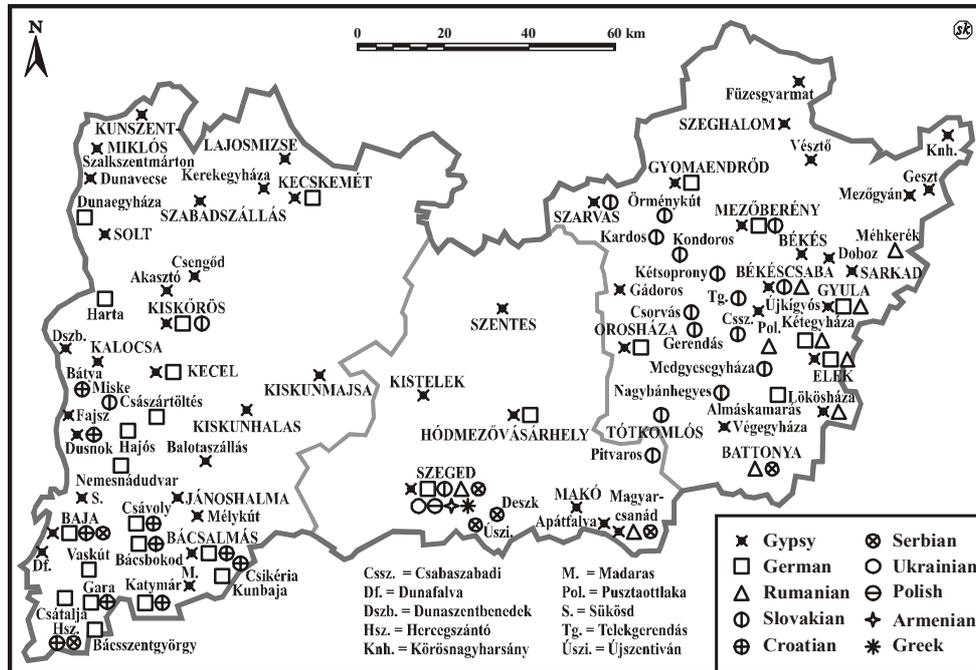


Fig. 6 The minority self-governments in the South Plain, elected in 1998

The state urges the strengthening cultural activity of minorities first of all with the help of minority self-government system. The electoral rules, functional order of self-governments, overshadowing of civil organisations, administration of finances in numerous respects are quite unsuited for serving successfully for maintenance of ethnic-cultural characteristics.

THE ETHNICAL DISSIMILATION

By the 1960's non-Hungarian ethnical units that in the 18th century hadn't been significant factors in Szeged, in the city leading Magyarization, disappeared, assimilated themselves to Hungarian population. In 1960, after the centuries of ethnical homogenisation non-Hungarian population of Szeged was of insignificant number; and in addition to it, these ones did not become ethnical community.

However, in the latest decades of the 20th century in the South Plain certain processes emerged those were in contradiction with the general tendency. The persons and families belonging to different ethnical groups settled in the city independently of each other, from different places and in different times. As a result of immigration, in 1990, 1904 non-Hungarian inhabitants were registered. In the 1990's, their number – in estimation – duplicated. At the same time, we must emphasize an important fact, which is more significant than numerical increase and these are certain signs of ethnical self-organisations, which can be noticed from the 1970's on in this population.

The persons belonging to the same ethnical units gradually got to know each other and became ethnical communities (Rátkai, 1998, 1999b,e, 2000). Here, ethnical

dissimilation gained ground as against general assimilation in the South Plain. Their societies established in the last quarter of a century endeavour to maintain and secure the ethnic-cultural and language peculiarities of these communities. As a consequence of this process 13 minority organisations were instituted: Slovakian (1975), Serbian (1977), Polish (1978), Rumanian (1982), Russian (1984), German (1987), Gypsy (1989), Vietnamese (1995), Greek (1995), Ukrainian (1996), Arabian (1997), Armenian (1998) and Latin (of Spanish mother tongue, 1999).

The ethnical communities in Szeged are small; their civil organisations have got 20-80 members. These little groups are in contradistinction to communities that are larger than these ones but they are of decreasing population. The inner activity of their organisations is more important than that of state subsidised ones. They are not followers of local traditions but representatives of a new-type culture of ethnical communities living in new city-dispersion. They are not natives of that place, and they did not come to Szeged from one certain settlement, but – even people belonging to the same *de jure* minorities – from different places of the country, moreover, sometimes from abroad. (Rátkai, 1996, 1997a,b, 1998, 1999a,b,c,d,e)

THE NN *EXLEX* MINORITIES

From ethnical communities of South Plain, only in Szeged we can meet with the Polish, the Russian, the Vietnamese, the Greek, the Ukrainian, the Arabian, the Armenian and the Latin. The Polish, the Greek and the Armenian were living in Large-Hungary already before the Peace Treaty of Trianon. According to the Minority Law of 1993, the Armenian, the Greek, the Polish and the Ukrainian are of Hungary, on the other hand the Arabian, the Latin (of Spanish mother tongue), the Russian and the Vietnamese communities are not of Hungary, but homeless, or if they are still of Hungary, then they are not minorities. This discrimination used against them is an action followed by considerable consequences. The authorities are willing to enrol their minority societies only on condition that they are not minorities but they are Hungarian cultural societies. According to this idea people belonging to *exlex* minorities are ‘cultural Hungarians’. Their judicial status reminds us of the Kurd’s life in Turkey who do not exist *de jure* because they are only ‘the Turkish of the mountains’.

The *exlex* ethnical communities, whose existence was not recognised, have got very modest and respectable cultural efforts. First of all, they would like to reach that their children should have possibilities to learn writing and reading in their mother tongue, that is they should not remain illiterate. For the sake of the maintenance of their ethnical-cultural characteristics, contrary to *de jure* minorities, they do not receive any state subsidy. For example, programmes of Ukrainian language are state subsidised, while the Russian ones could not obtain any promotion. (It is to be noted that in both cases we observe children of second or third generation whose majority was born as Hungarian subject.)

Division and turning minorities against each other is also an observable state pursuit. It happened in Szeged, too, that the state subsidy was refused from *de jure* minorities because the subsidisation was claimed within the frame of a joint programme with the *exlex* minorities. Factually, in this way, as it were, they punished everybody who would have been inclined to co-operate with *exlex* minorities.

Besides the mentioned ethnical groups, that reached the modern, civil organisation, there are newer ones too; though they have not yet established their minority organisations in the South Plain. From 1989-1990 on groups of the Chinese were settling in larger cities of the region, mostly in Szeged. The majority of their members is not of Hungarian subject yet, and ethnically mixed marriages are more infrequent in their circles than in other ethnical communities. The integration of the lately organised Chinese minority to the society of Hungary presumably will be more complicated than that of the others. The ethnical-cultural differences and differences peculiar to civilised communities between the former ethnical units 'living in Hungary' and the Chinese are not the main causes of the mentioned thought. The state does not make every effort to integrate them, moreover, the official line reacts to their presence in the worst way: it deals with them exclusively as with police causes, and therefore generates conflicts.

Numbers of population, belonging to *exlex* minorities, are one or two thousand. Their population is less by size than people of *de jure* minorities are. If we observe only those people who speak their mother tongue well, than the difference is not so big. In Szeged, the one third of the children of *exlex* ethnical units belongs to the *exlex* minorities. (Rátkai, 1999d).

It is a further important factor that the number of the population of *de jure* minorities is decreasing, while the number of *exlex* minorities is increasing. The different manifestations of state administration towards *exlex* minorities are more noteworthy than the mentioned previous element. Certain documents call them 'non-registered minorities', in a concealed way conveying that legally such minorities do not exist (cannot exist). The others consider them simply emigrants, while hiding, that almost every member of certain such communities is of Hungarian subject; in addition to it, the majority of them are belong to the second-third generation, and they are of double culture, they speak Hungarian on mother tongue level.

The politics used against *exlex* minorities is a part of developing antiforeignism which together with anti-gypsy mentality are slowly coming after the anti-Semitism that in the public life is becoming more and more 'outworn'. The positions of *exlex* minorities and the refugees have a lot of common characteristics with the situation of the incomers, which is also very problematical (Póczik, 1999). Racism has share in judging of both groups.

In certain respect, the status of *exlex* minorities is worse than that of the refugees'. On the basis of international juridical obligation the state enables the children of the refugees to be educated on their mother tongue. However, if such a refugee of *exlex* mother language, who obtained state performance, becomes an exciled Hungarian subject of *exlex* mother tongue, and in this case he cannot receive such a subsidy. On the whole, the position of *exlex* minorities is a more serious social-political problem in Hungary than situation of *de jure* NN minorities.

THE GYPSIES

Discrimination towards the Gypsies began in the 18th century, and took shape in a varying way, e.g. marrying of the Gypsies between each other was prohibited, they received new surnames, and their children were taken away from them in order to Magyarize them (Balogh, 1997). The Romany, in contradiction to other minorities, remained an excluded part of the society.

Number of inhabitants of the Gypsies is larger than that of other minorities' altogether. The theoretically controversial basic principle of sociological estimations works well in practice, too: Gypsy is a person who is considered as a Gypsy by his environment. The sociological researches are more reliable than census facts.

For the last time such a summing up happened in 1992, and according to its result 36,927 people (Fig. 7), that is 2.7% of the population were Gypsies (Kertesi and Kézdi, 1998) (Fig. 8).

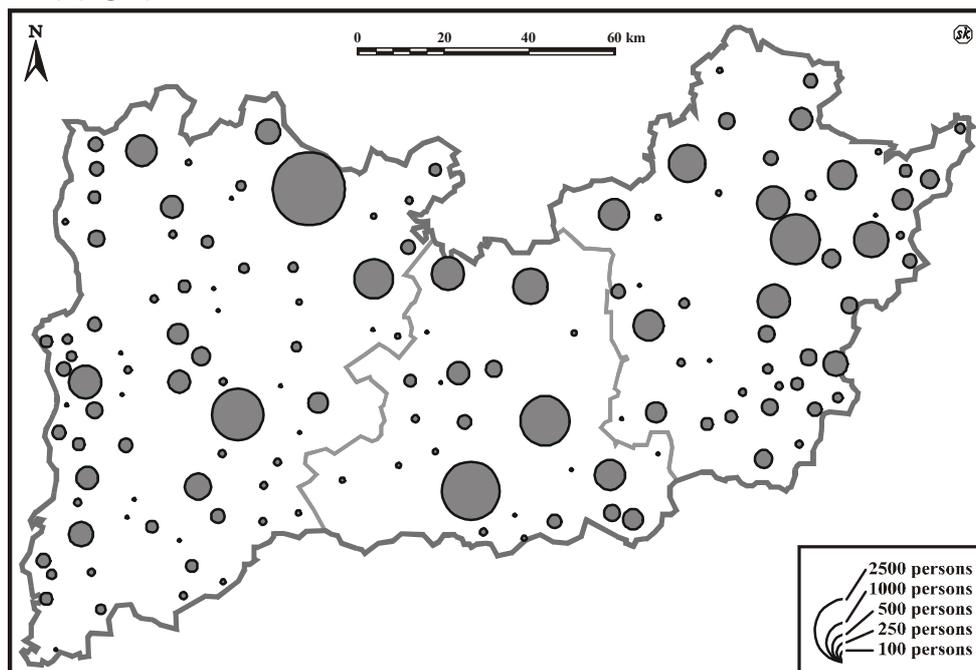


Fig. 7 The Gypsy population in the settlements of South Plain, 1992 (based on Kertesi and Kézdi, 1998)

In the largest masses they lived in cities. In 6 cities more than one thousand Gypsies were living: in Kecskemét (3288), in Szeged (2316), in Kiskunhalas (1814), in Hódmezővásárhely (1764), in Békés (1658) and in Kiskunfélegyháza (1105). However, their rate exceeds 10% only in 7 settlements of minor population (Geszt stands pre-eminent among the others with its 29.8%). Although in one third of the 249 settlements on the territories under survey (exactly in 85 ones) did not live inhabitants belonging to Gypsy ethnic minorities at all. It is striking occurrence that the parts, settled by Gypsies in high rate, are situated mainly on the border territories of South Plain Region (both on the western part of Bács-Kiskun lying along the Danube and on the eastern edge of Békés county close to the national boundary). However, in the middle part, in Csongrád county their rate is somewhat smaller (1.9%) than the average.

The Gypsies of the South Plain Region belong to 3 language groups: the Hungarian, the Romanies, and the Boyash (Erdős, 1969). The majority of the Gypsies are of Hungarian mother tongue, between them and the Hungarian population there is not a sharp dividing line (Kemény, 1999).

Between the Gypsies of Hungarian language and the Hungarians there is an intermediate stratum that becomes wider. The milieu itself is uncertain about judgement of their ethnical status. There are more and more Gypsy-Hungarian marriages, and there are more children who were born in such marriages.

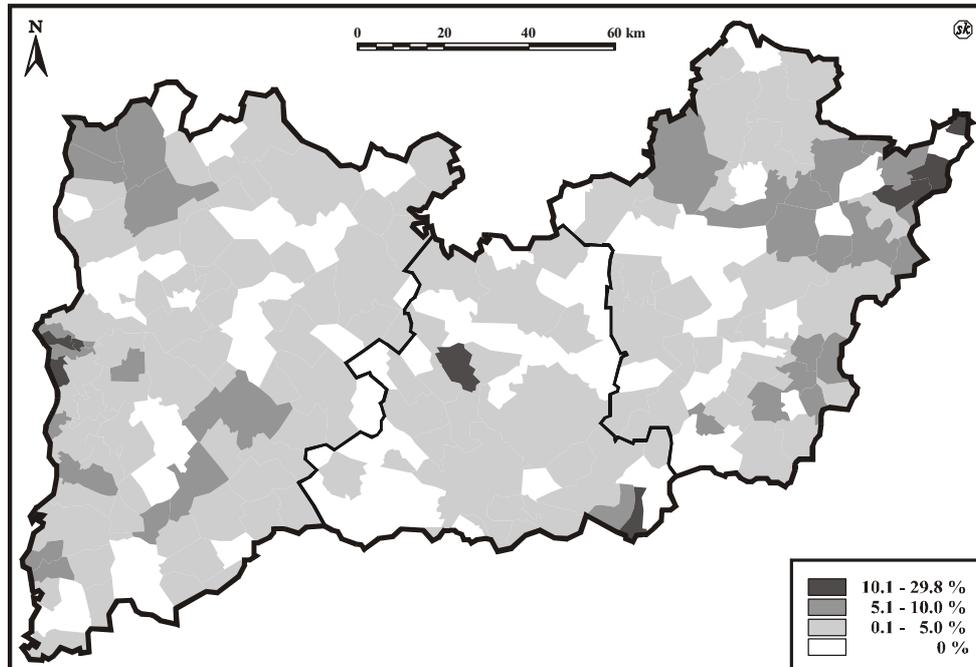


Fig. 8 Proportion of the Gypsy population in the settlements of South Plain, 1992 (based on Kertesi and Kézdi, 1998)

The ratio of Romany mother tongue can be estimated only on the basis of details of population census in 1990; their number was the highest in Bács-Kiskun (54%), in Csongrád it was lower (42%), while in Békés it was the lowest (29%). They can be characterised by diglossia, double Romany-Hungarian language. The usage of the two languages are complementary to each other, and in community members' life this double usage plays the same role that the single language does when we speak about unilinguism. The sphere of applicability of the two languages and their part, filled in communication, basically have nothing in common. The Gypsy mother tongue, learnt in the early childhood, is the intimate, familiar, seldom wider communal, informal usage, while the Hungarian language is more formal, it can be considered as a medium of school-, official, of working place and of communication with members of Hungarian linguistic community. In the region between the Danube and the River Tisza, people of Romany mother tongue speak mostly colompar-gurvari dialect, while in the eastern territories lovári is spoken first of all. Although it's a slow process, but transmittal and usage of the Romany language is being repressed. One of the reasons of it is the low status, the low social prestige of Romany language. Usage of Hungarian language is valued as a symbol of a higher social status. The intermediate stratum between the Gypsies of Romany tongue and those of Hungarian mother language is also wider.

In the South Plain the third group, the minor one is a community whose members are of Boyash mother tongue. They can be characterised by diglossia similar to that of people's belonging to Romany mother tongue. The Boyash language, which is fundamentally a Banate Rumanian dialect from the 19th century, is spoken only in some little settlements. The Gypsies of the South Plain according to their origin, social status, language and traditions, maintenance and abandonment of their identity, their integration level to the society, they live in, is the most proportioned, divided and least unified ethnical group. However, a certain homogenisation took place between them, because they inevitably got into direct touch with other people who spoke different dialects and with people of other tribes. The traditional Gypsy communities gradually disintegrated, the marriage prohibition on marrying people belonging to other tribes was observed more rarely, the tribal endogamy loosened up.

In the 1990's, an opportunity presented itself for Gypsies to establish minority self-governments (Figs. 5, 6, Table 4). Presently, in one fifth of the settlements local Gypsy minority self-government works.

Table 4 Number of local gypsy self-governments

<i>Year of the election</i>	<i>1994-1995</i>	<i>1998</i>
Bács-Kiskun county	6	26
Békés county	7	7
Csongrád county	21	20
South Plain total	34	53

However, the increasing minority activity of the Gypsies did not result in the improvement of their situation. The education of Gypsies is not organised in territories where they live in large number, and this is the most pressing type of discrimination of Gypsies belonging to Romany and Boyash mother tongue. The majority of Gypsy children do not go to kindergarten, although as a result of their social circumstances, they essentially should grasp the opportunity. After getting school their drawback is on the increase. Improvement can be reached only by changing children's bringing up and education between the ages of 3 and 10. However, their situation did not improve in this respect either.

Unsuccessful learning, repetition of a year's work in school is encountered in the most proportion in their circle as regard school children. After passing out from school they only multiply the number of the unskilled unemployed, and chance of adapting themselves to the society is minimal.

As a consequence of these processes, such Gypsy age groups pass out from beginner's school that are unfit for whatever learning or vocational training, and who are incapable of keeping themselves. These conditions continuously increase social tension and strengthen racism (both in Gypsy and non-Gypsy population).

Taken altogether, the situation of Gypsy population is a much larger and more complicated social problem than that of all other ethnical groups.

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